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14 Arrow Street

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Amherst Parking Study

Town of Amherst, Massachusetts

Report: Phase 1
25 January 1989

INTRODUCTION

This Report of the Amherst Parking Garage Study includes the Site Analysis, Traffic Study and Feasibility Study, constituting the report for Phase I of this project.

This report includes in addition to the Phase I tasks, the benefit of input received at the Charrette and a follow-up meeting with the Parking Task Force.

Site Analysis

Arrowstreet has completed a site analysis for each of the three sites. The Zoning Diagram which follows shows the location of the three sites in downtown Amherst. The sites are all close to the central intersection of Pleasant, Main, and Amity. This is the area of highest concentration of business activity and the lowest levels of private on-site parking.

Arrowstreet has examined the opportunities and constraints associated with each site and discussed these with the Parking Task Force and our Traffic and Financial consultants. For each site there is one or more recommended schemes, for which Arrowstreet is preparing schematic plans. In an Appendix are the preliminary plan alternatives for each site which were presented at the Charrette; the recommended schemes are to be developed in the next stage of the work.

Traffic Study

Abend Associates' traffic study is submitted with this report. Abend Associates, represented by Michael Abend, was also present at the Charrette to give a presentation on his findings of the current and potential traffic situations. His report reflects the discussions and concerns expressed at the Charrette.

Feasibility Study

The Financial Feasibility Study is included with this Report as prepared by financial consultant Leggat-McCall. An evaluation of the existing conditions, a parking management plan, the financial feasibility for a parking garage, and the suggested steps for accomplishing the goals set out by the Town of Amherst are addressed.

SITE ANALYSIS:

I. AMITY STREET SITE

Site Analysis

This site is located on Amity Street at the corner of South Prospect Street, in a Limited Commercial zone. The site consists of four parcels, only one of which is currently owned by the town. Its main use currently is a surface parking lot but also includes a single detached residence. It is the most exposed site of the three being considered, as it is a corner lot. There is a slight downward slope toward the south and west of the lot.

The architectural boundaries of the site are the Jones Library, the Amherst Cinema, and the detached residential structures on and to the west of the site. While Amherst Cinema, with little or no setback, maintains "downtown" characteristics and use, the other structures have considerable setback from their property lines on all sides, thereby taking on residential characteristics; uses, however, are a mix including business and rental activities.

A. Recommended Scheme A

One recommended scheme for this site is a narrow fronted garage using only the eastern half of the site. The facade would be approximately 120'-0" wide along Amity Street, with limited commercial development at street level, and $\pm 250'$ -0" deep. It is illustrated in the Appendix "AMITY STREET SITE: Option One."

1. Access

The main entry and exit to the garage should be on Amity Street with a secondary egress on South Prospect Street. However, increasing traffic on the residential South Prospect Street is deemed undesirable. Whatever traffic problems occur as a result could be alleviated via removal of meters in the immediate area of the egress(es). (See Traffic Report)

2. Visual Impact

- a. A narrower, rather than a wider street frontage generally would better maintain the scale of the town. The facade of the garage could be developed based on the parking bays within, and breaking down the scale of the structure to typical 20' facades.
- b. The subsequent development of the adjacent lots (corner of Amity and South Prospect directly north and south of existing rental unit) with considerable setback from the street would continue the pattern of the adjacent residential zone.
- c. If retail shops were lined along Amity Street at the ground level of the garage, the pedestrian experience would be greatly enhanced. It is the visual attraction of

the shops windows, signage, and pedestrian activity that would conceal the presence of the garage.

3. Development Potential

Retail space at the ground level of the proposed garage and the development of immediately adjacent properties would result in the extension of the commercial area further west along Amity Street towards South Prospect Street. Storefronts along Amity Street as part of the garage, and detached structures on the western half of the site would be a better transition into the adjacent Residential Zone than the existing surface parking lot.

B. Recommended Scheme B

An alternative scheme for this site is a garage situated on the southern half of the site. The facade would be approximately $\pm 200'-0"$ wide, and $120'-0"$ deep, with a $\pm 100'-0"$ setback from Amity Street. In this scheme, other appropriate private development would occur independently on the northern half along Amity Street. (This scheme is not illustrated.)

1. Access

The main entry and exit to the garage should be on Amity Street, directly adjacent to the Cinema, with a secondary egress on South Prospect Street. This flow would be similar to that of Scheme A.

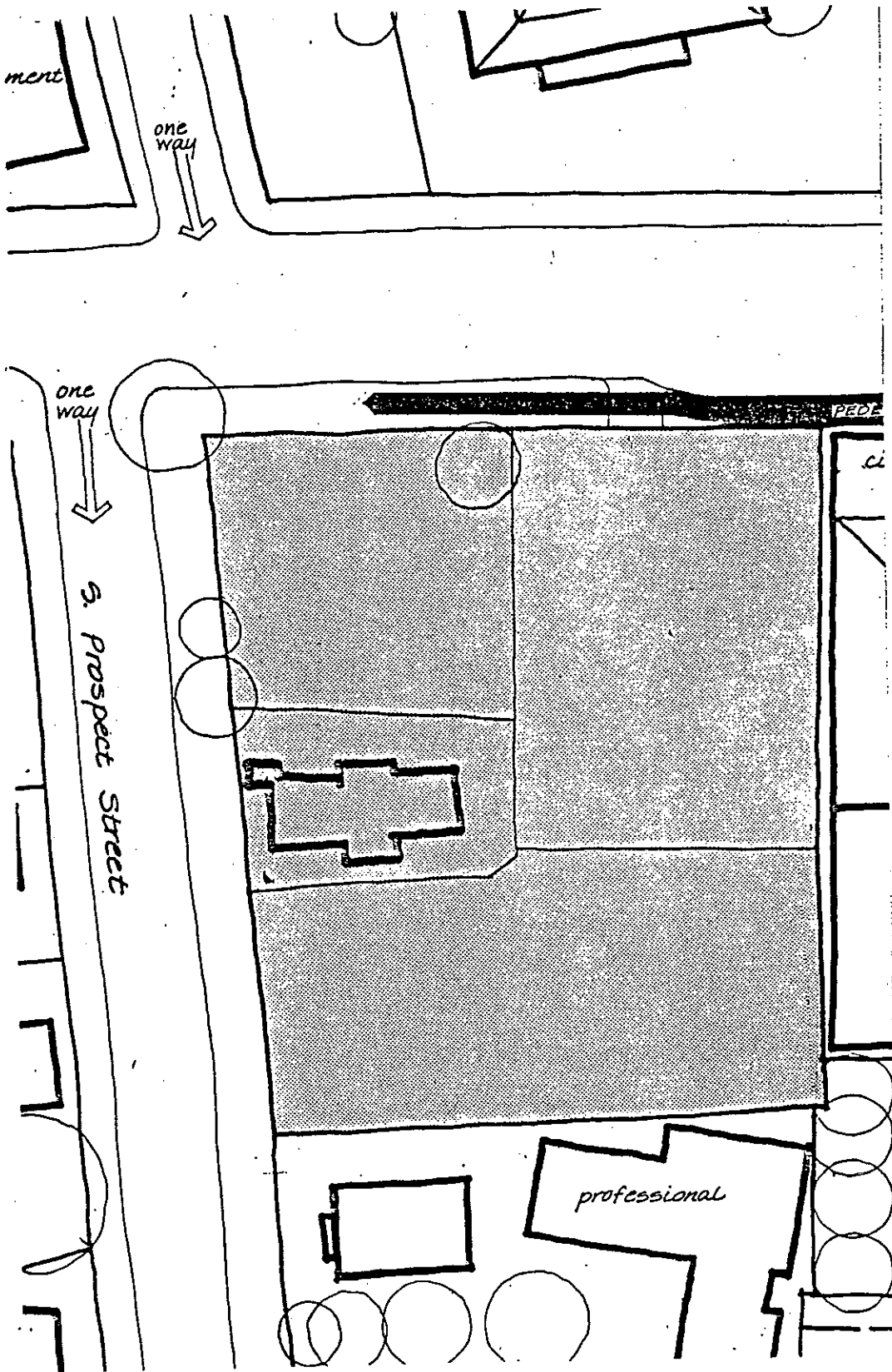
2. Visual Impact

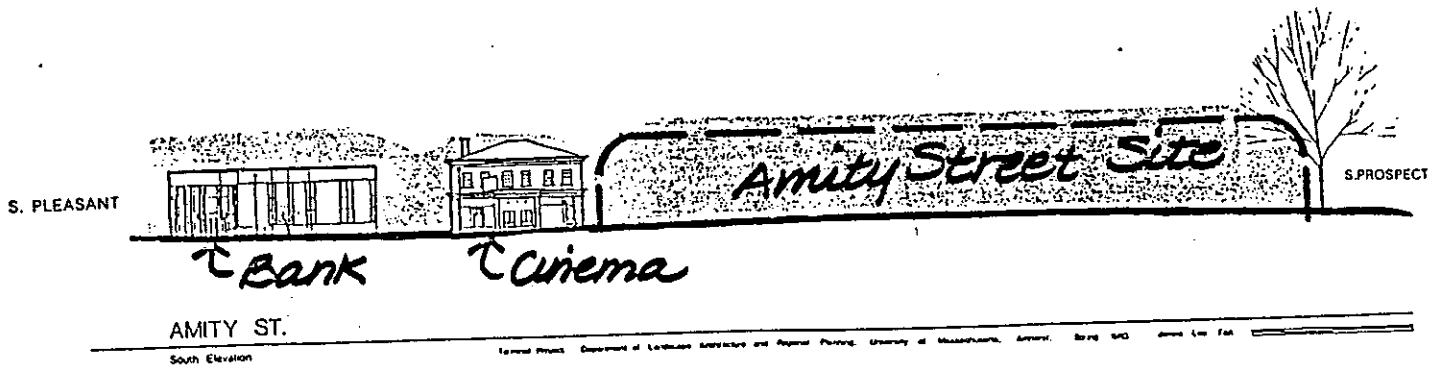
a. Siting the garage at the "back" of this site would allow the future buildings in front of it to act as a buffer or shield along Amity Street. Along South Prospect Street, however, would be a $\pm 120'-0"$ wide facade. It is highly recommended that this facade along the residential street be set back from the street and well landscaped.

b. The subsequent development of single, detached structures, with considerable setback along Amity Street would continue the pattern of the residential zone nearby. The lots should be landscaped and paved to clearly delineate the garage entrance driveway from walkways.

3. Development Potential

Using only the southern half of the site for the garage would allow for development on the northern portion of the property. (See paragraph 2. above) This would again result in the extension of the commercial area further west along Amity Street up to South Prospect Street. Whereas Option A, with storefronts along street level would continue a "downtown" pattern, Option B could be planned with setbacks that provide more of a transition to the residential scale in the next blocks to the east.





AMITY STREET SITE

SCALE 1" = 60' - 0"

STREET ELEVATION

SITE ANALYSIS:

II. BOLTWOOD WALK SITE

Site Analysis

The site is located in a Commercial zone, bounded by the backs of buildings that define the core downtown area of the Town, the Bang's Community Center, and Plumbley's. Some of the rear entrances are being developed and the Town is encouraging more of this. The design of the garage should reinforce this goal by providing amenities onto which the rear entrances can open. In any case, pedestrian and vehicular access must be maintained for many of the properties.

To the East of the site, the activities of the Bang's Center, Plumbley's, as well as the Anne Whalen house constitute the great majority of the traffic through Boltwood Walk. Maintaining circulation paths for the users and residents of these buildings is an important criterion.

It can be generally recommended that any garage on this complex site would have to be smaller than ones considered for the other two sites, and allow for greater flexibility in developing adjacent areas for community or commercial use. The goal for the Boltwood Walk area to remain a predominantly pedestrian area should be maintained for the livability of the Town in general, as well as the residents of the Anne Whalen House and the users of the Community Center.

Recommended Scheme

The garage should be kept to the northwestern portion of the site, leaving the southeastern half open for landscaping and/or development. The area utilized is proposed to include the back half of the funeral home property.

Although the construction of a largely underground garage structure would allow for the greatest amount of useable land above, the prohibitive costs would probably eliminate this as a real option. Some of the issues are:

- a. the difficulty of designing a structural system for the building above, that would be compatible with the structural system of the underground garage
- b. added cost for excavation
- c. added cost for considerably heavier reinforcing walls
- d. the high cost of landscaping over the garage
- e. added cost for ventilation.

A small parking structure (120'-0" X 150'-0") with a larger basement level would be a more viable solution.

Small retail space along the ground level, facing a public open space to the south would enliven this zone.

1. Access

The main access to and from the site would best function at Main Street. Altering the street pattern at Lessey and Main and the removal of parking spaces on the north side of Main Street up to North Pleasant Street would relieve traffic congestion (see also Traffic Report). A secondary access from Kellogg Street would be maintained, but vehicular through-traffic should be limited to emergency purposes only.

2. Visual Impact

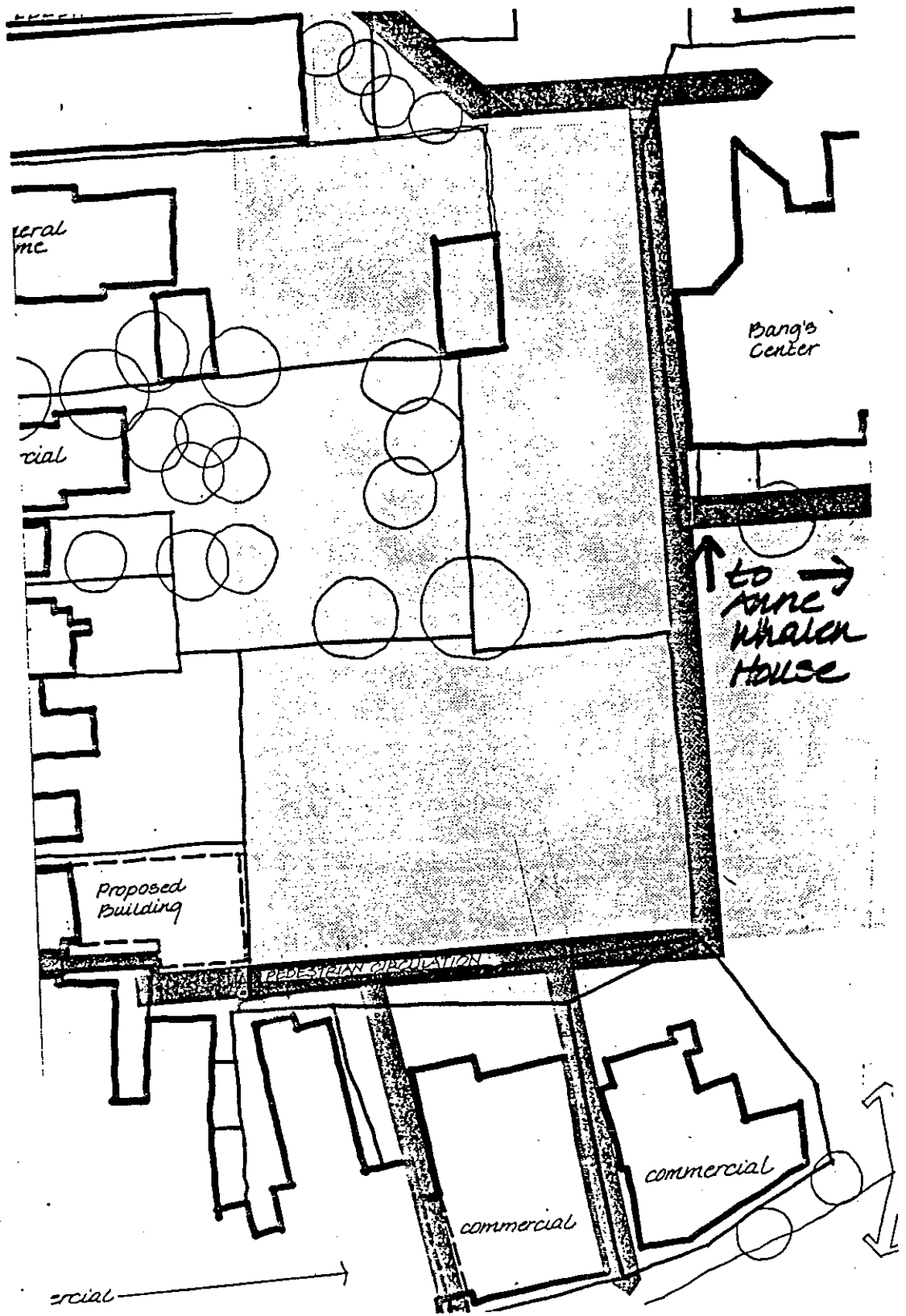
a. The appearance of the garage structure within Boltwood Walk as well as from the neighboring buildings is an important consideration. Specifically, this means views from the adjacent residential buildings, as well as the view by the pedestrians that use this area.

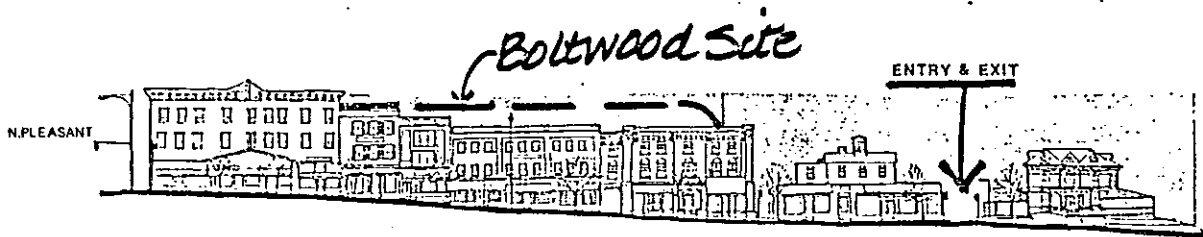
b. It is important on this site that the facade treatment of the garage responds to the human understanding of scale. The use of small scale elements and plantings to enhance the pedestrian's experience will be important to the final solution.

3. Development Potential

a. By providing an attractively landscaped open space, surrounding businesses would be encouraged to develop their rear entries, the experience of the pedestrian would be enhanced, and general pedestrian activity would be reinforced.

b. The building of a garage that leaves a considerable portion of the site for development could be a positive force in completing the Redevelopment Area. It seems that development has been hindered because of the inadequate amount of parking. Instead of viewing the building of a garage as eliminating valuable development property, a smaller garage could be a catalyst for the development of Boltwood Walk.

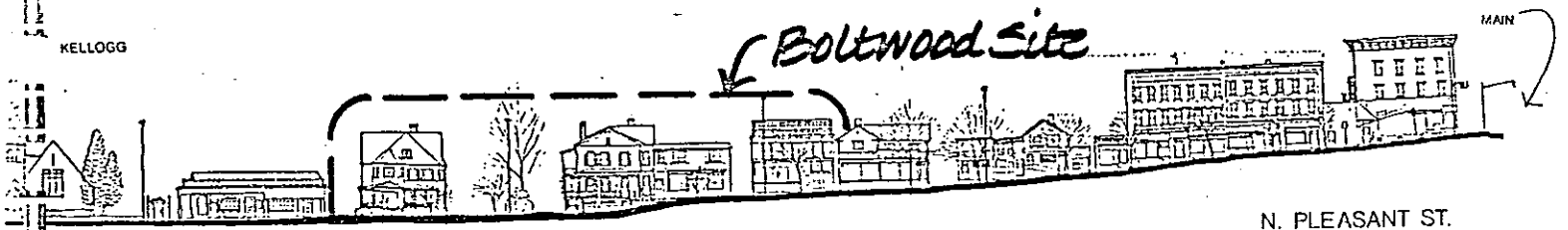




MAIN ST.

North Elevation

Tutorial Project Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning University of Massachusetts, Amherst Spring 1983 Artist Lee Fox



N. PLEASANT ST.

East Elevation

Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning University of Massachusetts, Amherst Spring 1983 Artist Lee Fox

BOLTWOOD WALK SITE

SCALE 1" = 60' - 0"

STREET ELEVATIONS

SITE ANALYSIS:

III. CVS/LOUIS SITE

Site Analysis

The site is located between North Prospect Street and North Pleasant Street, and is bounded by the Parish Hall to the north, commercial spaces to the east (CVS and miscellaneous others), and the Jones Library to the south. The area sits in a General Residence zone, and is bounded to the west by single family detached structures.

There are currently two attractive landscaping features of the proposed site: First, several large trees on the sidewalk along North Prospect Street should be saved. Second, along the southern border of the site is a stone wall that delineates the property of the Jones Library as well as the Strong House. Every effort should be made to preserve and enhance these elements.

The natural grade change may provide an opportunity to eliminate the need for a ramp inside the garage. This could be a substantial savings in space and cost.

Recommended Scheme

The recommended scheme occupies the northern side of the lot with surface parking along the south. It is illustrated in the Appendix "CVS/LOUIS SITE: Option One." The natural slope of the site allows the elimination of interior ramping from the ground to the first parking level.

A landscaped area on the southern edge for pedestrian use links the site with the Jones Library property. The green space, occurring at the intersection of the entry leading to the Library property and the site throughway, would be a focal point acting as an entry to the various activity areas of the site.

1. Access

1. Automobiles currently enter from North Pleasant only, and exit at North Prospect and this pattern should continue. The North Prospect access is also important for delivery trucks.
2. There is currently a conflict of pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the driveway access from North Pleasant. There are several solutions to this problem, a combination of which may be the best:
 - a. Reroute pedestrian access from the garage to a walk near the Fire Station.
 - b. Create a level change or other physical definition between the pedestrian and the car in the

driveway.

c. Encourage the use of one or more of the businesses as an access to the parking structure.

3. Truck service to the rear of the existing commercial buildings must be maintained; adequate room to maneuver would be provided by this scheme.

4. According to the Traffic Study by the Abend Associates, the added traffic load at the entrance on North Pleasant would not be a problem. Traffic conflicts at the intersection of Amity and North Prospect may be alleviated by the implementation of one or more of the following alternatives:

- a. Remove metered spaces at the corner of Amity Street
- b. Relandscape and remove any visual obstructions
- c. Change North and South Prospect streets so they align.

5. Providing an access to the garage from the parking area of the Parish Hall would be of great benefit to those using the Hall. Not only would the garage be patronized, but it would service the needs of the Parish Hall, and free up the on-street parking on North Prospect and Sellen Street.

2. Visual Impact

1. The Parish Hall to the north (see paragraph 4. above), the Jones Library to the south and the residences to the west are important neighbors to consider. A landscaped area on the south of the site would maintain an axis with the rear entrance of the Library while providing a pleasant entry for the parking area. Landscaping along a setback on the west side along North Prospect will also provide a transition to the residential area.

2. A three level garage would reveal a two level structure at North Prospect because of a $\pm 8'-0"$ level change from the east to the west side of the site. A four level garage may be acceptable because this will reduce the possibility that a residential neighbor would look out onto the roof of the garage.

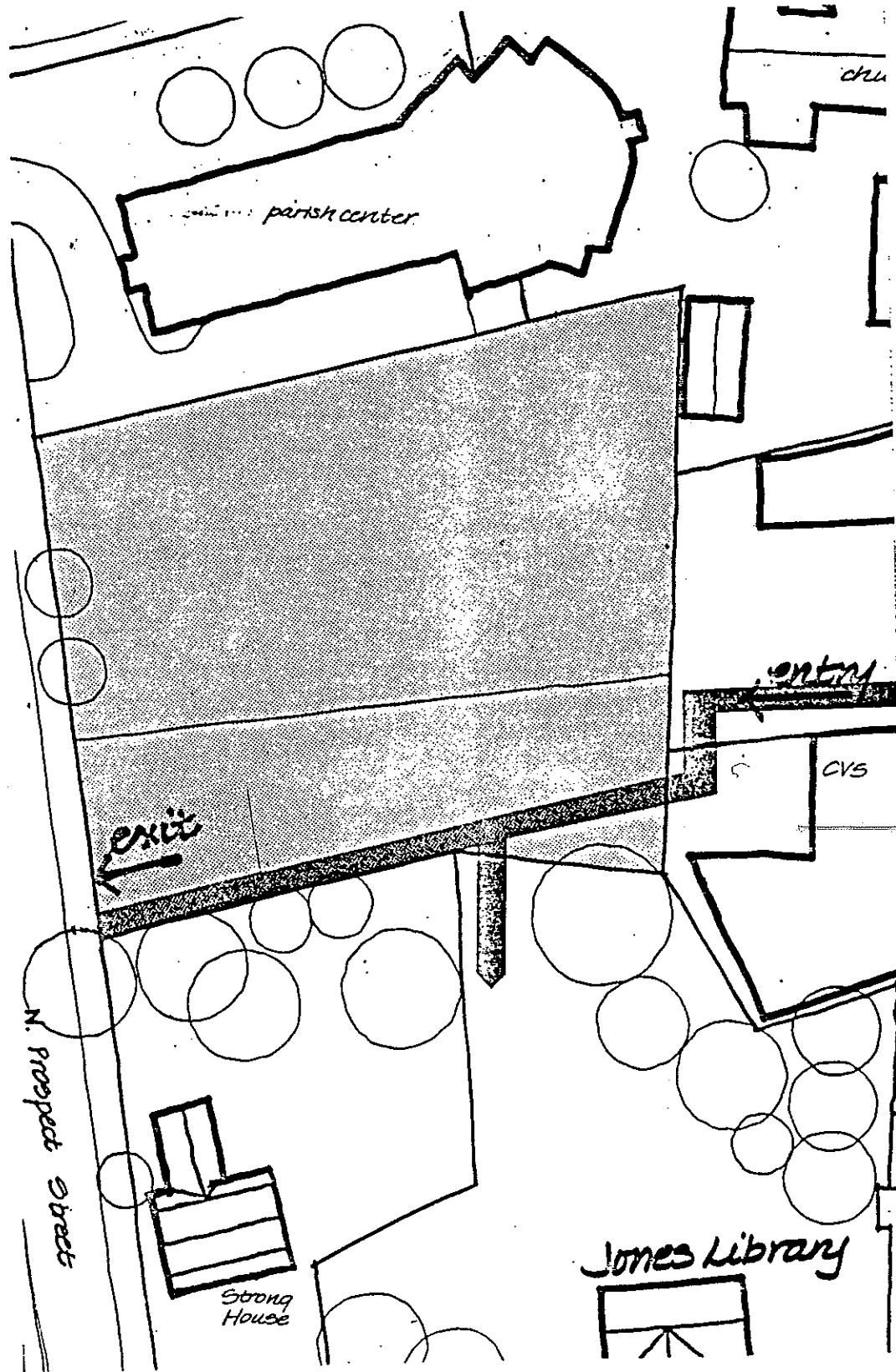
3. Development Potential

If additional development were desirable, a smaller garage structure, kept to the north and to the east of the site would allow for residential development on the

western side facing the existing single family structures. This option, though considered, is not recommended for further exploration.

A commercial plaza could be created by reserving the street level of the east side of the garage for small shops and upgrading the existing rear facades on adjacent properties.

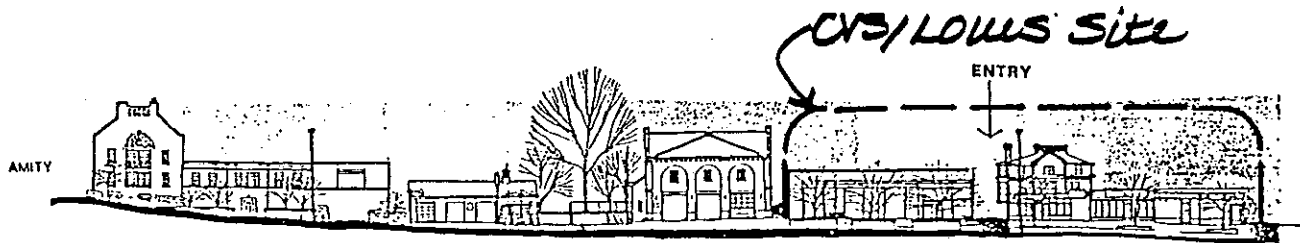
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CVS/LOUIS SITE

SCALE 1" = 60' - 0"

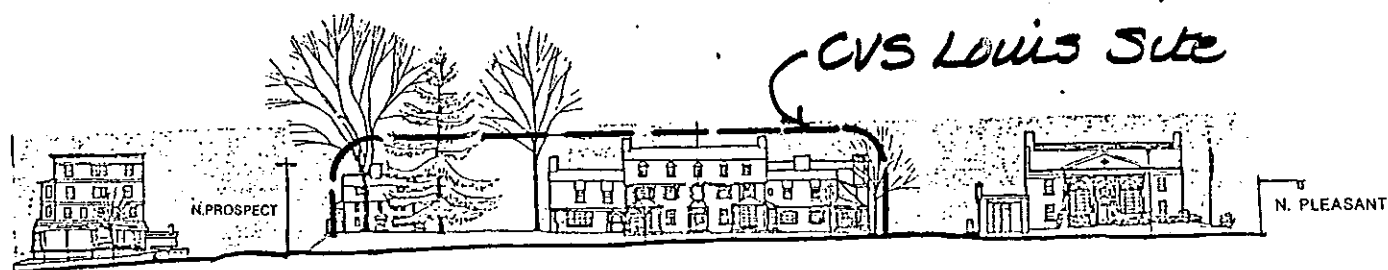
SITE PLANS



N. PLEASANT ST.

West Elevation

Terrell P. Housh, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Spring 1993, James Lee Felt



AMITY ST.

North Elevation

Terrell P. Housh, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Spring 1993, James Lee Felt

CVS/LOUIS SITE

SCALE 1" = 60' 0"

STREET ELEVATIONS